

# 2023 Rural Maryland Council Legislative Review

The Maryland General Assembly adjourned Sine Die on April 10, 2023 after final passage of the Fiscal Year 2024 Operating Budget and bills concerning cannabis legalization and regulation, minimum wage, healthcare, and crime legislation. The Rural Maryland Council and their associated grant programs - the Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund and the Maryland Agricultural Education Rural Development Assistance Fund, received level funding of \$9,046,194 in Fiscal Year 2024. We thank Governor Wes Moore, Senate President Bill Ferguson and House Speaker Adrienne Jones for their support.

## Operation and Capital Budget Highlights

This was the first year the General Assembly could exercise the expanded budgetary powers granted to them by the people of Maryland. With use of these powers, the Maryland General Assembly cut \$1.33 billion from the Governor's original proposal and added \$1.13 billion in spending.

The budget primarily highlighted Maryland's medical emergency systems, education funding, relief to low income families, and salary adjustments to state employees. The final budget appropriations for FY2024 is \$63 billion. At the time of its passage, the budget was structurally balanced and included \$2.85 billion in reserves, with \$2.5 billion in the Rainy Day Fund.

## Health and Human Services Transportation Improvement Act of 2023

(Delegate Kerr, et al. and Senators Ellis and Hester)

This bill establishes a State Coordinating Committee for Health and Human Services Transportation in the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) and repeals the limits on annual funding for the Maryland Senior Rides Program (MSRP) and the Job Access and Reverse Commute Program (JARCP) administered by the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA).

Through RMC's research and roundtables on the topic, we look forward to be able to work with the rural communities throughout the state to improve their non-emergency medical transportation options.

We would like to also thank the Maryland legislature for adding an additional \$300,000 to fund a pilot program for Maryland Non-Emergency Medical Transportation Program. This pilot program has been funded through the FY24 budget and is part of the RMC grant program currently.

## RMC Budget Priorities Achieved Under House Bills 200 and 202

- ⇒ RMC will receive \$9 million for the Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund and RMC operations.
- ⇒ The Maryland Agricultural Education and Rural Development Assistance Fund will receive \$118,485.
- ⇒ Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Program will receive a total of \$94.9 million.
- ⇒ MARBIDCO will receive \$8.3 million for core programming; \$1.5 million for specialty loan programs, \$1.4 million for specialty grant programs, and \$4.0 million for the Next Gen Farmland Acquisition Program.
- ⇒ Program Open Space will receive \$75.9 million for State side and \$89.2 million for Local side.
- ⇒ Rural Legacy Program funded at \$37.6 million.
- ⇒ Department of Housing and Community Development receives \$96.3 million for broadband assistance in the State.



Bill signing at the State House for HB596 and SB511, Health and Human Services Transportation Improvement Act of 2023 on May 3, 2023.

***The Rural Maryland Council would like to thank the many legislators and staffers who worked with us this year to accomplish our legislative goals!***

## Outreach Events

**Legislative Welcome Breakfast.** This year, we hosted a legislative welcome breakfast on January 17th to take the opportunity to welcome new and returning legislators back for a new term. This event was held at the Calvert House and had a very successful turnout of a total of 140 participants. Senate President Bill Ferguson joined the event and met with several participants to learn about RMC 2023 Legislative Priorities. The Event was sponsored by Maryland Rural Health Association, Maryland Community Action Partnership, Maryland Farm Bureau, and the Community Development Network of Maryland.

**Quarterly Exec Board Meeting and Legislative Luncheon** was held on January 27th at the Calvert House with 99 participants in attendance. Secretaries Kevin Atticks with the Maryland Department of Agriculture and Josh Kurtz with the Department of Natural Resources were the guest speakers. This Event was sponsored by Forever Maryland.

**Rural Maryland Day** was celebrated virtually this year on February 9th. The event provided an opportunity for over 100 rural advocates to meet with 52 key legislators to discuss both the strengths and challenges experienced living in rural Maryland.

**Maryland Day** was celebrated on March 24th, RMC held a Grab and Go Lunch for the Legislators on Bladen Street in downtown Annapolis. A total of 225 lunches were distributed. The event was sponsored by the Maryland Broadband Cooperative, Horizon Farm Credit, Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission (SMADC), Maryland's Best, Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO), Maryland Heritage Areas Coalition, and the Southern Maryland National Heritage Area.



*Photo: Where the former Department of Legislative Services building once stood, is now currently a construction zone in the middle of Lawyer's Mall. This development presented challenges in event planning for this session, and will continue through the completion of this project.*

## Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund - Allocation of Grants (Rural Communities Improvement Act of 2023)

(Delegates Sample-Hughes and Adams)

This bill alters the required distribution of money from the Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund (RMPIF) by modifying one grant category to also include agricultural development, cooperative development, and workforce development.

The Council members and rural non-profit community leverage these funds with local and federal funds to improve the lives of rural Marylanders. RMPIF funding allows many rural organizations to provide innovative programming that creates jobs, educational opportunities, and enhances the quality of life in our rural communities.

For many nonprofit organizations and stakeholders, RMPIF provides the critical support needed to fuel healthy, resilient rural communities.

### Rural Legislative Highlights:

- Maryland Rye or Maryland Rye Whiskey established as the State Spirit. (HB178/SB497)
- State Specialist for Value-Added Agriculture established as a position in the Maryland Department of Agriculture. (SB34/HB389)
- An emergency bill establishing a commercial blue and flathead catfish finfish trotline license. (SB80/HB386)
- Altering the Certified Local Farm and Fish program and allowing it to include food from certified Chesapeake invasive species providers. (HB63/SB386)

## Legislative Highlights

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**EVENTS HELD**

**Welcome Breakfast, 1/13**

**Legislative Lunch, 1/27**

**Virtual Rural Maryland Day, 2/9**

**Maryland Day Lunch, Bladen Street, 3/24**

# 7

**LEGISLATIVE MEETINGS**

**The Legislative Committee met this session to discuss bills, testimonies, and other legislative matters**

# 60

**POSITION STATEMENTS**

**Position statements submitted to the legislators in support of bills**

# 135

**BILLS MONITORED**

**Total bills monitored throughout the legislative session**

# 3

**RMC BILLS PASSED**

**RMC introduced and successfully passed three bills this session - HB695 and SB511/HB596**

***RMC is grateful for the hard work of its Legislative Committee and rural advocates who made the 2023 session a success.***